



Advent 1, Year C – November 29, 2009

A Homily preached by the Very Rev'd Robert Pynn

Spread a wide screen across your mind's eye -- high definition, digital signal. Add enhanced Dolby surround-sound and witness the relentless rhythms from the Mars section of Holsts' Planets, then add a run of ominous chords from Orf's Carmina Burana. And, if you are a Star Wars fan, turn up the sound on John Williams' Death Star motif.

Now let the image of a Mushroom cloud break onto the screen and run quick frames from the 'War of the Worlds', 'Apocalypse Now', and 'The End of Days.' For humour, open the Ghostbuster's gate to Gozer, the destructor or shift to the latest Blockbuster, 2012.

Literature, religious texts, and the silver screen, especially since WWII, have abounded in apocalyptic tales of world ending invasions from outer space, technological disasters, Pandemics, earthquakes, typhoons or colliding Asteroids. The list is endless. Some, like 2012, tie into alleged ancient predictions of world disaster. Many express the ancient phobia of Divine judgment and the universal fear of personal and collective death.

Even the contemporary Media's compulsive attention to disaster scenarios sets us up for the worst- case- definition of an Apocalypse. Little wonder that when we read the Gospel account of The Son of Man's second coming we associate it with a literal vision of divine judgment and the end of the world.

The Son of Man who comes in a cloud with power and great glory is clearly an agent of world ending phenomena, very unlike the Christmas story of Jesus' birth. I remember an old bumper sticker I saw in California. " Jesus is coming and boy is he pissed."

You may remember an old joke that pictured an intruder making his way up the stairs to the second floor of a home where he assumed there would be jewelry and other treasures to plunder. A voice blared out "Jesus will get you for this." After several repetitions it became clear that this was the voice of a parrot in cage at the top of the stairs. The intruder dismissed the silly bird and continued up the stairs. What he failed to see was a Doberman Pincher poised at the base of the cage. It was too late when the parrot said, "Sic him Jesus!"

Now it can be tempting to use Jesus as a weapon of revenge and judgment.

Choose your enemy or out- group and sic Jesus on them. Get the proof texts and collect the apocalyptic sayings and images that predict their demise and then secretly revel in the fact that they have gotten theirs.

Scenarios of doom can be employed to exercise fear-induced-power over the innocent and the vulnerable. Create a privileged in-group who know they will be saved, for whom the coming of such destruction on the multitudes of unrighteous is their sign of redemption. Clearly such a view of apocalypse draws on a dualistic, warrior-consciousness that has dominated religion and world culture since about seven thousand BCE.

The greatest irony of all is to associate such a divisive, conflict based mind set with the Blessed One who comes to break open a New Age of non dual consciousness and compassionate living.

Apocalypse literally means lifting the veil. It is about peeling off the impermanent surfaces to see what treasures live at the depths of things. Apocalypse breaks the lens of our assumptions to see what our conventional mind is not open to see.

I am sure most of you have heard or read the news reports about Ron Houben who, at the age of 20 was in a near fatal accident in 1983. 43 years later with the aid of new neurological technology it was discovered that he was conscious all these years while trapped in a completely immobile body. Doctors, based on the conventional knowledge of the time, assumed that he was unconscious. The new technology lifted the veil over his condition and revealed something very different. Behind this is another paradigm shift in neurology that now sees the brain as a constantly changing mass of activity that has the capacity to regenerate itself under the right conditions.

Louis McNiece wrote a wonderful poem called Mutations that captures the essence of this apocalyptic experience. I'll read only a short excerpt.

" ...Each of us has known mutations of the mind,
when the world jumped and what had been a plan
dissolved, and rivers ran from what had been a pool.

For every static world that you or I impose
upon the real one must crack at times, and
new patterns from new disorders open like a rose,
and old assumptions yield to new sensation.
The stranger in the wings is waiting for his cue.
The fuse is always laid to some annunciation."

St Luke sees the stranger coming in a cloud with power and great glory. The image of the stranger fits here because the Son of Man comes from a transcendent realm with a wisdom that will crack open the static world that you or I impose upon the real one.

The power and weight of his presence is not that of a divine warrior meting out God's vengeance on an apostate race. It is not about punitive judgment or the justification of "the chosen". His coming is the revelation of transformed consciousness. This is the redemption we will see if we do not run about in fear trying to save what must fall away from the static surface of our lives.

Look again at Luke's images: the shaking of the powers of heaven, signs in the sun and moon, distress in the earth and among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves---people fainting from fear and foreboding of what is coming.

But if they stand and look, what they fear is really the coming of a new shift in consciousness that will be their redemption!!

Eric Hoffer once said that in times of drastic change it is the learners who will inherit the future. The learned usually find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists.

The tension and anxiety of the learning process cannot to be avoided. All learning involves the rearrangement of our former patterns of understanding to accommodate new insight.

Any movement forward involves the breaking open of old certainties embedded in our learned mind so that the capacities of our spacious learning mind can embrace the fire of some new annunciation!

In tonal music the teleology of the composition or to say it a different way, the purpose filled movement of the music and its capacity to evoke the sacred in time is bound up with leading us to dissonance and then through dissonance to consonance or a new resolution.

Musicologists tell us that the in the 15th Century, resolution of dissonance into consonance in the context of rhythm gave music a powerful means to create expectations.

In Bach's Cantata 140, "Sleepers Awake" The expected resolution of the Hymn tune is displaced by the introduction of a overlaid counterpoint usually played by the strings. The two interlocking themes transform each other and reveal more and more of themselves as they are turned and woven into a richer sense of sacred expectation.

Now, these examples may be a bit difficult to get in the abstract but we all have experienced them and will experience them again and again in our Advent Liturgical music. Such music exists to help us experience the deep realities of our lives. We will experience what it models as we open our selves to the key signatures of coming glory in this wonderful season!!

Advent actually takes us through foreboding dissonance to consonant expectation as we prepare for a new unfolding. In this unfolding, old assumptions yield to new sensation and new patterns open like a rose. The dramatic image of the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory offers not substantially different to a rose opening in the virgin womb of a young Jewish woman.

Both are apocalyptic! Both lift the veil over what is really real. Both propel us into a new love consciousness that is continually making all things new.

It is a "learning love" that opens the path to union and compassionate living. Fear, judgmentalism and the old warrior consciousness dissolve in the fire of love's annunciation and the light of a new Axial age spirals forth, never to be extinguished.

Today's Advent Gospel says that this generation shall not pass away until all this has come to birth." Again Luke is not referring to an external one time historical event that clearly didn't happen. He speaks of the birth of inner consciousness, the lifting of the veil on a journey begun before time and reaching through time to an ever ascending journey of eternal consonance.

Therefore, keep your eyes open and be alert and don't cling to what is passing away. Love bids you welcome to the dynamic realm of the power of union and constantly spiraling light.

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